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TROELTSCH'S CONCEPTION OF THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JESUS

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It is the purpose of this article to examine certain typical statements made by Professor Ernst Troeltsch concerning the significance of Jesus for Christian faith, and to consider certain criticisms of this position which have been made.

I. THE PLACE OF THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY AND ITS CULTUS

"One of the clearest results of the history and psychology of religion," says Troeltsch, "is this, that the essential thing in religion is not dogma and idea, but cultus and community—living communion with the Deity, and, indeed, a communion of united spirits, that has its life-roots in the religious, and its ultimate power to unite individuals in faith in God."¹ Even where full communion with the Deity is mediated through a priesthood, it is still a communion in which the operations of the priest open the way for the community's real participation therein.

Not only is this the case with the so-called nature-religions, but it is true also of the more spiritual religions, though here communion is not through bloody sacrifice and rites, but through worship and edification. "And that is the reason why Platonism and Stoicism, in which the religion of the spirit was already manifesting itself, were absorbed by Christianity; and why Christianity, on its breaking away from Judaism, became a *Christuskult*."²

Now what, according to Troeltsch, was the nature of the primitive *Christuskult*? "It was not the worship of a new god. It was the worship of Israel's God—the Father of all spirits—in his highest, living and concrete, revelation. The God-faith of the first believers in Christ had no dogma and no body of doctrine.

¹ *Die Bedeutung der Geschichtlichkeit Jesu für den Glauben*, p. 25.

² *Ibid.*, p. 26.

Its religious content was crystallized in the glorified Jesus—glorified through the resurrection-faith. There were no bloody sacrifices and rites, no magic and no mysteries, but only the worship of God in Christ, and living union with Christ in the Lord's Supper."

Far-reaching changes were introduced into the simple cultus of the primitive Christians. "But whatever elements may gradually have worked their way in from Mythology and the Mysteries, heathen and gnostic analogies, they simply gave body to an independent organism, making more intelligible the primitive Christian consciousness that was begotten by the inner logic of the situation." The motive prompting the first Christians to institute a Christ-cultus is clear enough, Troeltsch goes on to say. The revelation of God in Christ was their common possession, and to keep that heritage living and communicable "they simply had no other way than the rallying about the worship of Christ as the revelation of God, whereby the eternal God revealed in Christ was again made truly and inspiringly manifest to the individual soul."

And the motive that prompted the early Christians to construct their Christ-faith, and to propagate their new God-faith by the institution of the Christ-cultus, is the motive that inspires us today to continue the same, though under different forms and conditions. We may take it as a social-psychological law that, "whenever individuals come, in general, to think and feel alike—as they come to do most of all in a highly refined and individualized culture—they cannot go on for any length of time without interaction and interconnection; that, out of the thousand lines drawing men into relation with one another, everywhere community-circles are begotten, with higher and lower ranks, in which there is absolute need of a concrete central point." It is a law which holds also for the religious life. And hence we make bold to assert that, "without community and cultus, there could be no real certainty and power with respect to the Christian idea, the saving knowledge of God."

Again and again Troeltsch utters this conviction. He would refute in particular the contention of the religious individualist who maintains that *Religion ist Privatsache*. He would show the

impossibility of the position of Lessing and Ibsen and kindred spirits, in which it is held that religious faith does not need historical supports, but can express and propagate itself by virtue of its own purifying and saving power, and develop freely out of its inner depths as it touches life in general. "The prevalent tendency," he says, "to disparage religious community and cultus is the real disease of modern Christianity and modern religion as a whole. Because of it religion is more and more taking on a dissolvent and chaotic character; it begets the contingently-personal, enthusiastic, and amateur types of religionists; and in some quarters religion becomes purely intellectualistic and philosophical. There is no dominating rallying-point from which religion can derive its bearings and nurture; there have arisen as many centers as there are feeling and seeking individuals. But modern religion has become not only chaotic and indefinite. It has become also weak and lifeless, because it lacks the reacting influence of a community-spirit, because the individual misses the sustaining and uplifting power exerted by a community, misses the power, too, which sets for him practical community tasks."¹

Surely, Troeltsch keeps insisting, the history of religion must not be ignored by the individualist. In accord with the social-psychological law enunciated above, we see everywhere the rise of religious communities with definitely appointed upper and lower orders of adherents, fixed rallying-points, means of development, and centers of energy, through which religious life and thought are forever renewed. In the nature-religions all this is effected by the very forces of nature and society, and the rallying-point is the ancient cultish tradition. In the great spiritual religions it is the founder and prophet who takes the central place, to whom, in fact, is accorded religious worship. This was already the case in the religious schools of the Platonic and Stoic philosophers, as it was later in Christianity. It does not mean the enlargement of a pantheon, either. It simply means the keeping alive of the prophet in the consciousness of the believers, at the summit of their divine worship, as the concrete expression of divine truth revealed in and by the prophet. This is the fundamental

¹ *Die Bedeutung der Geschichtlichkeit Jesu*, p. 25.

basis of every religious community and cultus. And it is highly probable that religion will ever perpetuate itself thus.

The "third gospel" of Lessing, or the "third kingdom" of Ibsen, in which, as regards religion, all depend upon themselves and the spirit implanted within each one freely develops in isolation, without community and cultus, one can be quite sure will never be realized. No more can we dispense with community and cultus in religion than we can get along without the state and organized commerce and science in the more secular spheres of life. In every sphere of life individual minds and interests are mutually related, and develop in interconnection.

"Whether the existent churches"—this question is peculiarly pertinent in Germany—"are capable of meeting the community needs of the modern Christian is a problem *für sich*. It is possible that, by a change in our general political organization, they will be led to fall back and embrace only the groups that still cling to the old ecclesiastical dogmatic. But it is possible, too, that such political changes may lead to the organization of broad *Volkskirchen*, in which the manifoldness of modern Protestant religious thought will be allowed to come to expression. However, no matter what changes come, so long as Christianity continues in any sense, it will have a cultus connected with it, in which Christ will be accorded the central place."¹

This is not, as Troeltsch intimates, the place to discuss conditions in the churches of today, and the question whether the churches are fulfilling, or are able to fulfil, their mission as the expression of the *corpus mysticum Christi*. Yet, by way of parenthesis, the writer cannot refrain from referring to the half-dozen articles that deal with this question, in the second volume of Troeltsch's *Gesammelte Schriften*. Such articles as the ones headed "Religiöser Individualismus und Kirche" and "Die Kirche im Leben der Gegenwart" exhibit a treatment of this disquieting problem that is highly impartial, penetrating, and judicious. There is, to be sure, a strong plea for greater freedom, and for considerable revision, in view of changed conditions in thought and life in general; but it is recognized that "a thorough-

¹ *Die Bedeutung der Geschichtlichkeit Jesu*, p. 29.

going reform of the churches, by way of a uniform revision of their dogmas and cultus, is altogether impossible. They are historical organizations, and, naturally, conservative, making such a revolution unthinkable. Besides, the very life of large groups of people is so inseparably bound up with the old dogmas and forms that it would be manifestly unjust. Furthermore, the whole idea, so often expressed, of a reconciliation of religion and culture is in itself highly questionable. The greatness of religion lies precisely in its opposition to culture, in its distinction from science and a social-utilitarian morality, in its generating of super-worldly and superhuman forces, in its awakening and development of the phantasy, and in its fixing upon that which lies beyond sense and intellect. A religion reconciled with science would, for the most part, be nothing more than a bad science and a superficial morality, and would thereby lose its religious salt."¹ A sentence in the first of the articles cited is especially pertinent at this point: "If we learn to look upon the church as the *Gemeinschaft des Geistes Christi*, then we shall quite naturally hold that the *Landeskirche* must perceive itself to be the expression of the *corpus mysticum Christi*. And when we do that, it will be possible for us to eradicate the intolerable consequences of a radical individualism."

This parenthesis could easily be extended, but we must pass on. Enough has now been said to show the great importance for the Christian religion which Troeltsch attaches to community and cultus, and we will next devote a section to the very important point, already partially covered.

2. THE INDISPENSABLENESS OF JESUS AS HEAD AND CENTER OF THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

As we have seen, Troeltsch firmly believes that, "so long as Christianity continues in any sense, it will have a cultus connected with it, in which Christ will be accorded the central place." In this section we wish to define more clearly the sense in which Troeltsch conceives this giving of a central place to Christ in the Christian cultus, as well as to emphasize the importance he attributes to this aspect of Christ's significance.

¹ "Die Kirche im Leben der Gegenwart."

1. *The social-psychological need of Jesus as a rallying-point.*—When Troeltsch speaks about the indispensableness of Jesus as head and center of the Christian community and its cultus, he wishes it to be understood as a social-psychological indispensableness. Every living religion, we have noted, is dependent on community and cultus, and on a rallying-point, and “the Christian cultus must always therefore have for its center the gathering of the church about its head; the nourishing and strengthening of the members of the church, by immersing themselves in God’s revelation as concentrated in the person of Christ; the propagation of the Christian faith, not through dogmas, doctrines, and philosophies, but through the keeping alive of the Christ-picture in its vital religious aspects; in short, the worship of God in Christ.” And such giving of a central place to Christ rests clearly on a social-psychological basis—on laws that dare not and cannot be ignored. Individualistic Christianity would ultimately mean the vanishing of a vital Christian religion; and the Christian cultus without Christ as focus would result in vagueness and disunity, as well as lifelessness and fanaticism. Individuals who think otherwise, and refuse to unite with the church, have no conception of the way life in its various phases is propagated; they do not realize, either, to what extent they are indebted to the churches for their own religious life.

With this position churchmen will be in hearty agreement. But many of them will object that it does not go far enough. It does not allow for prayer to Christ. Indeed, there is a sentence in *Die Bedeutung der Geschichtlichkeit Jesu* (p. 30) in which Troeltsch definitely holds that “actual personal communion with the person of Christ is of course not possible.” For those who are accustomed to pray to Christ, Troeltsch’s position will therefore appear inadequate at a most vital point. And it is to be regretted that he does not give his reasons for holding that prayer to Christ is not justifiable. At least the writer cannot find that he has given them in any of his writings.

But it is likely that Troeltsch would say that communion is possible only with God, the Infinite, the Omnipresent Spirit; that it is inconceivable that a multitude of souls could, at one and the

same time, come into contact with a personality that did not have the attribute of omnipresence. And if it is maintained, as some hold, that Christ's personality was after his death exalted to infinity, are we not driven to the conclusion that there are, in fact, two gods? No other conclusion would of course be possible, unless it be conceived that Christ's personality did not continue as a separate personality, but was absorbed by the personality of God (which would, however, make prayer to Christ meaningless). In any case, as William Newton Clarke says, "with the Christian faith all polytheism, even though it be no more than tritheism [and he might have said, "ditheism"], is absolutely inconsistent. . . . One God, one mind, one will—this is the only form in which any belief in God whatever is possible in the world as we know it now."¹

Dogmatism is entirely foreign to Troeltsch, and one may be quite sure that he has no wish to be dogmatic about the Kingdom of Heaven into which departed spirits have entered, about the present status of these spirits—their capacities, and especially their capacity to hold intercourse with earthly spirits. He doubtless has great respect for the faith of those who pray, not only to Christ, but also to Mary, the mother of Christ, and to the saints. He would recognize, too, that such prayer may have a subjective value of the highest sort. But as for its being prayer in the full sense—that is, actual communion between the praying soul and the departed spirit—that he could not concede.

However divine was the personality of Jesus, however exalted the place he undoubtedly occupies in the heavenly kingdom, it is highly improbable, Troeltsch would likely say, that he was invested with all the attributes of God—that the attributes of his personality, in other words, were exalted to infinity. Certainly the predominant conception in the New Testament is against that idea. "To us there is one God, the Father, . . . and one Lord, Jesus Christ," writes Paul (I Cor. 8:6). The superiority of God is expressed in such passages as I Cor. 3:22 f.: ". . . all is yours, ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's"; and Phil. 2:11: "And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory

¹ *The Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 237.

of God the Father." Even in the Fourth Gospel, where is expressed the unity of God and Jesus (in the sense of the Philonic Logos philosophy, or, again, as meaning a harmony of will and purpose), there are very striking subordinationist passages, such as: "The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father doing"; "I can of myself do nothing"; "I seek not my own will, but the will of him that sent me"; "My teaching is not mine, but his that sent me." Now if this be true, that "to us there is one God, the Father"—only one infinite, one omnipresent spirit—then with God alone can mutual communion be held.

Into the psychology of prayer to Christ and other departed spirits we cannot here go. The writer would simply venture to suggest that all the benefits that are claimed to be derived from such prayer can surely be secured from prayer to God. Not to believe this would be indicative of a very meager conception of God. But men crave and need, it is claimed, the concreteness of Jesus. This can, however, be gained in prayer to God, by keeping the picture of Christ vividly before one's consciousness; which is, in fact, just what Troeltsch is contending for. And whatever help and strength Christians are wont to say they receive through being in personal touch with the heavenly Christ (or with Mary and the saints), they can be at least as fully and truly helped and strengthened under the conception advocated by Troeltsch.

Men like Professor Mackintosh would, presumably, retort: "In that conception 'it is not denied that in a real sense our relation to God is mediated by Christ, yet it is a Christ whose direct influence on men ceased at death. . . . He does not act on us from the unseen. . . . His presence is departed, though we can drink in the spirit of his words and thus indirectly have communion with his mind.' And 'Faith's object must be now and here. . . . Faith looks upward, not backward only. . . . Men could not be thus intimately one with a Life that was, but is not. . . . If Christology is to reproduce the Christian certainty, it must define faith in Jesus as faith in him as the living and transcendent Lord. . . . The men and women who made Christian history have been animated by the faith that the exalted Lord can make the limitless resources of his transcendence available for the

humblest of the saints. . . . And anyone who is at pains to analyze the doctrinal implications of an ancient hymn like the "Te Deum," or a modern hymn like "Jesus Lover of My Soul," may satisfy himself as to the futility of supposing that bare reverence for tradition inspires the church's affirmation of Christ's perpetual presence.' Does, in short, Troeltsch's conception afford a sufficient basis for specifically Christian life?"¹

A sounding of the depths of Troeltsch's position would not, however, yield such a retort. In the first place, we can be quite sure, from his eschatological hope, that he thinks of the personality of Christ as living on in the heavenly kingdom; that, for him, coming into intimate touch with the person of Christ is not becoming "intimately one with a Life that was, but is not."

Again, Troeltsch's position does not mean rallying about "a Christ whose direct influence on men ceased at death." The God-ordained psychological forces operative in the soul's contemplation of the figure of Christ assuredly produce a direct influence on men. That figure, "full of grace and truth," can and does exert a direct saving power, when men view it "with the spiritual eye." True, though Troeltsch thinks of the personality of Jesus as now existent, what is here meant is a contemplation of the historical figure of Jesus. But, as a matter of fact, they who believe that Christ does "act on us from the unseen"—that he is able to commune with us from "the veiled place where he dwells on high"—must picture Christ when they commune with him in terms of the historical Jesus. As Professor Mackintosh admits, "Certainly the risen Christ is the same person as formerly, otherwise the apostolic gospel, devoid of a *point d'appui* in history, would have become inept, since no one can preach a great Unknown, or ask for loyalty to a formula."² And later (pp. 378 f.) he calls attention to the perils of a Christ-mysticism divorced from the Jesus of history: "Thus the exalted Christ vanishes in a mist of sentimentalism or dialectic." Well, a Christ-mysticism in which Christ is conceived in terms of the historical Jesus can surely yield

¹ Mackintosh, *The Doctrine of the Person of Jesus Christ*, pp. 364-68.

² *Op. cit.*, pp. 363 f.

no more than the *Christuskult* of Troeltsch; the influence of Jesus is in both cases equally direct and powerful.

In truth, however, for Professor Mackintosh as for all Christians who are given to prayer to Christ, Christ is now "omnipotent with the omnipotence of God; to him belongs absolute might to continue and consummate the work begun by his life, death, and victory." And it may be that "short of this the Christian mind is not expressed." But who is so unknowing as not to recognize that the Christian mind has, from the beginning, even as expressed in our hymns, carried within it elements that in the future were shown to be unwarrantable? One instantly recalls the eschatology of the first Christians, notably the time-element therein, which was of vast import for their religious life. "Have we any right to assume," asks Professor Cairns in his review of Professor Mackintosh's book, "that there may not be in the minds of those of us who hold with conviction to the positive position, residues of the past that the future will not justify?"

At all events, one is led to inquire, in the spirit of reverence, what could an omnipotent Christ, from his veiled abode, do for us that God himself is not able and willing to do for us? Is it likely that followers of Jesus who, by the grace of his personality, put their trust in God for the continuance and consummation of the work begun by the Master have a faith less Christian or less efficacious than the one in which Christ occupies the place of God? Are men and women who are conscious of the presence of God and are animated by a Christ-evoked, Christ-interpreted, and Christ-sustained faith that *God* can and does "make the limitless resources of his transcendence available for the humblest of the saints" more impotent in helping to promote the Kingdom of God than those who are animated by the faith that the heavenly Christ can do this?

Verily this is a delicate question. And at no point in our religion more than at this one do we need to heed the injunction of Jesus: "Judge not!" Equally learned and sincere Christians are, as they always have been, coming to different conclusions, even with regard to vital questions like the one we are now considering, and mutual tolerance is in such cases the truly Christian

attitude to take. Prayer to Christ, all must admit, is traceable throughout Christian history, but, so long as men like Professor Cairns come to conclusions like the following, those whose faith justifies them in praying to Christ ought not to disparage the position of those who pray only to God; indeed, they ought to examine well the ground of their faith, for they who pray to Christ must admit that they give encouragement to the people who also feel justified in praying to Mary, to the saints, to the Buddha, and other departed spirits, and foster the perilous mysticism alluded to above. We quote from Professor Cairns's review, already cited: "When all is said, the center of faith in the New Testament is placed in God, and in the Gospels this is quite clearly God the Father. The central motive of Jesus is not, as Seeley said, his enthusiasm of Humanity, but his enthusiasm of God, and his *ultimate* aim is not to awaken faith in himself but in his Father. . . . This, moreover, seems to me the dominant type of apostolic religion. Christians are those 'who through Jesus believe in God,' and this is not 'Godhead' but 'the Father.' Moreover, we have the considerable number of subordinationist passages in the New Testament to consider in this connection. Either we must regard these as 'vestigial survivals' or use them as vital utterances of faith."

Well, then, there would seem to be ground for Troeltsch's holding that "actual personal communion with the person of Christ is of course not possible." Though it is quite true, too, that dogmatism on this point is impossible, either in favor of or in discouragement of such communion. In any case, however, we may accept Troeltsch's conception of the Christ-cultus, resting on a social-psychological basis, as conserving all that is vital for specifically Christian life. On the side of prayer this conception obviously allows for prayer to God "in the name of Christ," or "through Christ"; for communion with God as he revealed himself in and through Christ—a communion made concrete by drawing into it the divine figure of Jesus, letting his thoughts and words and motives and actions color our communings with God. And such prayer no one can reasonably call un-Christian, nor can one doubt that it is all-sufficient for the nurture of the Christian life.

Having then more particularly defined the sense in which Troeltsch conceives Christ to be indispensable, as head and center of the Christian community and its cultus, we must enlarge upon the value he sets on such a *Zentralstellung* of Christ.

2. *Men's need of the concrete symbol of Christian truth and life furnished by Jesus.*—To speak of Jesus as a symbol is, for many, seriously to underestimate the significance of Christ. But that is because the word "symbol" has for them an impoverished signification. Here we are faced again with the difficulty of a term being conceived differently by different theologians. For one group a symbol "illustrates spiritual reality rather than demonstrates it." For another it means "an object, animate or inanimate, standing for or representing something moral or intellectual." The question of demonstration would thus depend on the character of the symbol, as well as the truth symbolized, and is not to be answered by any a priori definition of the term "symbol." In any case, the common notion regarding the impersonality and lifelessness of a symbol obviously rests on an a priori conception of the meaning of this term. For the fact that truth is symbolized by inanimate objects does not prevent its symbolization by a living person.

"The greatness of Christianity is precisely this, that it has constituted as its center and symbol, not a rigid and lifeless dogma or a just as inflexible and benumbed moral law, but the figure of a living, many-sided, and at once uplifting and energizing personality, whose inmost motives form the guiding principles in the religious-ethical tasks that confront Christians from age to age."¹ This sentence gives the gist of what Troeltsch means when he speaks of Jesus as a symbol—the prominent notes about his conception being, clearly, the notes of personality and vitality, as over against an impersonal and lifeless symbolism.

Troeltsch is quite aware that attempts to crystallize the personality of Jesus in a dogma, or to make it an ethical law, have never been wanting. "But the living elements of an indefinable personal life have, despite such attempts, always manifested themselves. And on this fact rests Christianity's capacity for renewed simplification and rejuvenescence. For this reason, too,

¹ *Die Bedeutung der Geschichtlichkeit Jesu*, p. 43.

there have always been attempts to completely isolate Jesus, to make him entirely independent of the history that preceded and followed him and hold him to be the exclusive support and basis of faith."

But these latter attempts, like the attempts to compress the person of Christ within a dogma, Troeltsch feels, are unjustifiable. For we dare not blink the fact that "the *Vorstellungswelt* and the *Ethos* of Jesus are bound up with the quite definite situation of late-Judaism, and with the rugged one-sidedness of the purely religious prophet; that, in his preaching of the Kingdom of God, he anticipated a new world and humanity under new conditions, gauged entirely by a religious ideal, and expected the same to be realized in the near future. In view of this fact the faith of the primitive Christians released the spirit of Christ from its historical connections, and treated it as the regulative principle of an ongoing development. Only let us look for this development, not so much in ideal results and systematic views of life, as in a further series of strong religious personalities, who fed upon the person of Christ and out of his spirit brought forth things new and old; just as the spirit of the Hebrew prophets was in Jesus, and new growth was generated in him out of this prophetic seed. . . . And this rich historical development, as well as the person of Christ, must be freely and candidly drawn upon to give definiteness to the Christian idea, and in order to its realization with living power."¹

Troeltsch also vigorously maintains, more particularly in opposition to Ritschlians, that the Christian *Idee*—Christian truth considered in the abstract—does not depend upon the person of Jesus for its verification. The doctrine of God's forgiveness, for instance, is abstractly verifiable (as all truths are) by its reference to consciousness, there to let its own inherent truth find its counterpart in the a priori forms of consciousness. Expressed in Pauline language, Christian truth is verified through the Divine Spirit's "testifying along with our own spirit." The extreme Ritschlian claim, that "without Christ I would be an atheist," and that "only through the fact of the moral personality of Jesus, made perfect through suffering, could God enter once more into

¹*Ibid.*, pp. 43-44.

communion with men who have sinned," is simply not true to the facts of religious history. "The still small voice" of God has been perceived in all ages, in the souls of men of every race, and the measure of truth vouchsafed to them—even such truths as were championed by Jesus—depended for verification on an inherent truthfulness disclosing itself to "the spiritual eye." To make Christian truth *absolutely* dependent on Jesus would be, furthermore, to make it hinge on the continually changing results of historical study, not to speak about the real externality of such a basis.

Is not then Troeltsch inconsistent when he urges that Jesus must be given a central place in the Christian community and cultus, and that men have need of him as the living symbol of the Christian faith? He would insist that he is not inconsistent. Granted, he would say, that Christian truth is verifiable on the basis of an intrinsic truthfulness; that Jesus cannot and dare not be separated from the line of prophets and psalmists upon whom he fed, and the series of saints who have fed upon him; and that God has, indeed, in all times spoken savingly to men, either directly or through other servants than Jesus—granted all this, it is also true that *most* men are not of themselves capable of perceiving and appropriating Christian truth (just as they are not of themselves capable of perceiving and appropriating mathematical or philosophical or any other truth); that Jesus is "the personification of transcendent religious power, whose heart-throb permeates the whole of Christianity, just as the vibrations of a ship's machinery are felt in every nook of the boat"; and that, therefore, the keeping alive of Christian truth "is not possible without viewing it in its creative embodiment in Jesus."

It were time, perhaps, to remark, though it ought to be self-evident, that Troeltsch's plea for community and cultus, in which Christ occupies the focal place, contemplates the very highest type of individual participation. It is a plea in refutation of religious individualism that would do away with community and cultus, but not a plea for community and cultus divorced from personal activity on the part of individual members of the community. Without such personal participation the individual would of course

derive no real benefit. In an age which disparages the very idea of the church, which argues that religion is purely *Privatsache* and public worship valueless, the emphasis belongs clearly where Troeltsch puts it, i.e., on the necessity of community and cultus. His thought is rightly echoed by a recent English writer: "The man who does not consciously attach himself to the organized spiritual environment of the nation, but burrows inward to some psychic center remote from the invisible but real social organism, is making for the abysses of insanity, criminal egoism, self-deification, and the primordial slime of sensual occultism. When the leaders of the churches realize this tendency, they will shrink in alarm from every form of individualistic psychology."¹ Still, at this point let the fact be brought definitely before us that, most assuredly, the profoundest sort of personal participation is expected of those attaching themselves to the Christian churches; in truth, a profound Christ-mysticism.

But why a *Christ*-mysticism? Why is it not possible to keep alive the Christian faith "without viewing it in its creative embodiment in Jesus"? For the reason that "all the greatest and most characteristic thoughts of Christianity—about a grace that has come to and seized us, about a certainty that has been tendered us, and a transcendent power that has uplifted and subdued us—are inseparably connected with the religious estimation and interpretation of Jesus as the revelation of God. And to break this connection, to separate the Christian God-faith from the person of Jesus, would mean the wrenching of this faith from all its historical roots, from all means of representation and demonstration, from all that greatness of personality which, for the average individual, is indispensable; would mean, in fact, ultimately, the dying out of the Christian faith."

Troeltsch too can speak of "the living Christ," and one has the feeling that, in so doing, he conserves all the healthy spiritual vitality with which that precious phrase has in all ages been filled. It is true, as we have seen, that he does not encourage prayer to Christ, does not speak about Christ as he now lives in the heavenly region—for the reason that we seem to be barred from communication

¹ Stanton Coit, *The Soul of America*.

with the spirits who have departed to that region (despite the explorations of spiritualists and the Psychical Research Society). But, at all events, it is a living Christ that Troeltsch has in mind for the keeping alive of the Christian faith; the Christ as he lives in the New Testament, made and kept living for us by the psychological forces at the disposal of every human soul. The superior personality that lives in the Gospels need not be less living (not less vital for faith, at least) for us, than it was for those who knew that personality in the flesh. And, while that personality of course blends with the personality of the heavenly Christ; while faith in the heavenly Christ carries with it certain glorious truths peculiar to itself—such as cluster about the resurrection and life after death for all; yet it is primarily the Christ of the Gospels—Christ, that is, as he *lives* in the Gospels—who, in Troeltsch's view, gives vitality to the Christian faith.

Indeed, it is the Christ of the Gospels who alone can give definiteness, as well as vitality, to our thought of the heavenly Christ. For John, and for Christians generally, the vital thing in the life of Jesus consists in a gracious "unveiling of the mystery of the invisible God." Thought of the heavenly Christ, apart from the Christ of the Gospels, would therefore be quite as mysterious as thought of God apart from the historical Christ—yea, more so, for God has revealed himself, in some measure at least, in and through various personalities throughout the history of mankind. And hence it is quite inconceivable why certain Christians should wish to minimize the importance of the Jesus who lives in the Gospels. Their thought being centered quite exclusively on the heavenly Christ, they are almost certain to fall into the perils of mysticism so poignantly described by Professor Mackintosh. "The danger," he says, "which has long shadowed faith in the exalted Christ is that of an unbridled and capricious mysticism. Ideas gained currency respecting his interposition in human lives which have no relation to his known character. The glorified Redeemer has been isolated from the historic Jesus, while the individual soul has in turn been isolated from the vital organic brotherhood of the church. . . . The living Person is discarded, and instead we are offered a dream of passion or a lifeless philosophic principle."¹

¹ *The Doctrine of the Person of Jesus Christ*, pp. 378-79.

It is the living Christ of the Gospels, then, that Troeltsch regards as of primary importance for the maintenance of the Christian faith and life. "Only by the contemplation of such a personality as lives in the Gospels can the average individual overcome his spiritual weakness and poverty, and be moved to accept the prophetic-Christian God-faith with power and certainty. But if that is so, then wherever the Christian God-faith is to flourish with full power and might, the living figure of Jesus will remain inseparably associated with it. A Christ-mysticism in which every believer perceives his faith to be a radiation from that central point, and in which believers ever newly unite themselves in the religious interpretation and adoration of Jesus as the revelation of God that lifts us above ourselves, and that increases in potency, through the centuries, as a world-historic force—such a Christ-mysticism will forever remain the kernel of genuine and true Christianity, so long as there will be a genuine and true Christianity. Without it, too, the personalistic God-faith would itself be hard pressed and finally perish."¹

At first thought it may appear to some as if such a Christ-mysticism is decidedly inferior to the Christ-mysticism of Paul; as if, in truth, there is no real relation between them. A painstaking comparison will, however, lead to a different conclusion. Complete identity they will of course not discover. As J. Weiss has pointed out, in his "Significance of Paul for Modern Christians,"² to be "in Christ" seems to have meant with Paul "a complete blending with the heavenly Lord into a mystic union, in which, indeed, the sharp outlines of the personal figure become blurred into the notion of an all-pervading Christ-spirit." At least Paul felt that communion was possible between the heavenly Christ and the believer. And this, as we have seen, Troeltsch feels is not possible. He might grant that it was possible for a spirit like Paul's, which could be "caught up even to the third heaven" and "up into Paradise," but who would maintain that the average spirit is endowed with such capacity? And, on the side of Christ, he might grant that the spirit of the exalted Christ on occasion

¹ *Die Zukunftsmöglichkeiten des Christentums.*

² *American Journal of Theology*, XVII (1913), 352.

may come, as in the case of Paul's conversion, into direct contact with a human spirit, but this again is something extraordinary.

Paul could say, and many Christians can say, after Paul, that "the Lord is the Spirit" (II Cor. 3:17), all-pervasive in the same sense as the almighty God, whom Christians like Troeltsch hold to be the one Omnipresent Spirit. But this is an absolute equating of the person of Christ with the infinite *Pneuma*, which rests on a peculiarly fluid mode of conception common in Paul's time; such as is indicated, e.g., in Rom. 8:9 ff., where there occurs the alternation between the expressions, "the spirit of God or of Christ in us" and "Christ in us." It was the same fluidity that made possible the Hellenistic mysteries, and the conceptions of "the Son of Man," "Divine Wisdom," "Logos." And this way of thinking, modernists feel, arose because God very generally was localized in a dwelling-place beyond the earth's limits; whereas the Christian view would seem to be that the one transcendent God is directly in touch with our universe—creatively, sustainingly, and self-impartingly. In Christ the self-imparting God, modern Christians believe, is manifest in spiritual purity and power as he is manifest nowhere else; indeed, they believe that the ethical nature of God is, in principle, wholly expressed in the person and work of Christ. But, since there are elements in God's personality that were not expressed in Christ (notably in the region of intelligence), they still regard God as transcendent over Christ, however transcendent the latter may be over the rest of mankind, And hence they cannot, with Paul, equate absolutely the person of Christ with the infinite *Pneuma*. And therefore there is no problem for them such as faced Athanasius and Arius. There is, indeed, the problem of how the infinite, transcendent Spirit of God can be universally present; more especially, how God can impart himself so fully in a historic personality, that for many the only solution is the complete equation of God and the historic person. But these problems belong to the class of problems that, apparently, are beyond human intelligence, such as: How did the personality of God originate? In the case of any really creative personality, what in it is divine and what human?

However, neither by Paul nor by any of the New Testament writers is Christ always identified with the Spirit absolutely, with the entire fulness of the Spirit, described as the "summing up" of all spirit. As J. Weiss has shown, this absolute identification occurs only in passages of speculative cosmological thought, where Christ's relation to the world is referred to or he appears as the basis of all divine revelation. As spirit is the clear mark of God in the world, and as the Son of God, the heavenly Man, the Logos, is regarded as that side of God which is turned to the world, the complete identification of one so transcendently spiritual as Christ with the Spirit is naturally suggested. "But where the question is not of Christ's place in the cosmos, but of his person, its special quality, constitution, and origin, he is described rather as a personality belonging to the sphere of Spirit; his actual, primal nature is *Pneuma*; he is a spiritual being among other spirits" (see, e.g., I Cor. 12:13; 14:32; 15:45).¹

Then there are the considerable number of subordinationist passages, to which reference has already been made. And as Professor Cairns has intimated, why are not these to be taken as vital utterances of faith? The two strands of passages are there, and they are contradictory—just as there are contradictory strands in the writings of all creative personalities or of all creative periods. If the absolutistic passages are accepted as true, then the subordinationist passages are meaningless. But if the latter are accepted as true, the former cannot be taken as likewise true. Not loyalty to tradition can be the determinant here, for both sets of passages are equally clamant. Nor can the demands of a preconceived idea of atonement be the determinant. Our view of God must be the determinant factor. And if we believe in one God, one mind, one will—one Transcendent yet Immanent Infinite Spirit, transcendent over all other spirits, even the sublime Spirit of Christ—then we must accept the subordinationist passages as true.

And so accepting, we will be entirely sympathetic with the absolutistic passages, as daring attempts to commend Christ to people breathing an atmosphere surcharged with messianic and

¹ J. Weiss, *Christ: the Beginnings of Dogma*.

Logos speculations. Such daring attempts were by no means uncommon in ancient times. Indeed, the deification of important historical characters was a quite common occurrence. But our view of God simply makes all this impossible for us. In view of the subordinationist passages, one may, then, rest satisfied that the absolutistic passages were simply results of the Pauline purpose to "become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some." We too can speak of God in Christ, of the deity of Christ, and not in any empty sense, either; it is our most precious heritage to perceive in Christ the unveiling of the mystery of the invisible God, and to be drawn by him into saving communion with God and brotherly relations to our fellow-men, as we are not drawn by any other self-disclosure of God, but we believe it is in accord with the spirit of Christ (as predominantly portrayed in the New Testament) that, while we call him Lord and Master, we should still regard God as transcendent over him.

The reverent heart, seeing the glory of God in the face of Christ, in moments of devotion makes no distinction between God and Christ, but, as soon as thought enters, faith expresses itself in the terms of the subordinationist passages. In its soberer moments faith perceives that it is vital to distinguish Christ from God, and rejoices that the soul is enabled to launch upon the deeps of God's omnipotence—the same deeps upon which Christ himself was launched, according to his own confession. The imperativeness, the self-assertiveness of Christ, like the imperativeness and self-assertiveness of the prophets and of Paul, does not spell self-sufficiency; and the acknowledgment—"of that . . . knoweth no one . . . but the Father," matching the Johannine "He can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do"—coupled with the spiritual struggles recorded in the Gospels (notably that in Gethsemane), must, if we are going to be full-fledged followers of Christ, cause us to progress with Jesus to the Father.

But again we are reminded of Paul's Christ-mysticism. Surely, it is claimed, Paul was entirely dependent upon the exalted Christ. "My ego no longer lives: Christ lives in me; the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself up for me." But did not Paul also write such passages

as Rom., chap. 8? "For the sons of God are those who are guided by the Spirit of God. . . . And when we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is this Spirit testifying along with our own spirit that we are children of God; and if children, heirs as well, heirs of God, heirs along with Christ. . . . If God is for us, who can be against us? . . . When God acquits, who will condemn?" Here, as in other passages, Christ obviously is the mediator. And should not then such an utterance as "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" be read in the light of these passages? Paul might feel justified in praying to Christ, as others do, and as others feel justified in praying to other departed spirits; but the real point is: Is the Christian faith at all impoverished when prayer is offered only to God, and Christ is regarded only as mediator? Is the Christ-mysticism advocated by men like Troeltsch any less vital for faith than the Christ-mysticism of Paul, in which God and Christ are apparently (sometimes at least) equated, and therefore prayer to Christ is offered in moments of devotion?

J. Weiss has shown that the mysticism of Troeltsch is essentially the way that the Fourth Evangelist already traveled. For with John abiding in Christ means, in reality, not communion with the heavenly Christ, but a religion of belief in Jesus of Nazareth as the revelation of God, of communion with God in accord with this revelation, and its accompanying moral life; for the fulfilment of which Christ's person, full of grace and truth, is God's gracious gift to mankind. To behold in the ideally transfigured Christ the grace and truth of God, to attain through him knowledge of God, to have him always before one's eyes as leader, leading us to God and to loving relationship with men, to abide in his love, to do his commandments, and to abide as he did in the love of God—this is the essence of the religion of John; and it is the essence of the Christ-mysticism of Troeltsch. As Weiss says, "This concentration of the inner life upon the figure of Jesus, living with him, working with his mind, reflecting his being in one's own life—this is a form of the Christ-mysticism which is possible even for the modern man."¹

¹ Cf. Weiss's *Significance of Paul for Modern Christians*.

The passages in the Fourth Gospel that are colored by the Logos conception do, it is true, contain elements that assert the complete equation of God and Christ, but nowhere else do the subordinationist passages stand out so prominently as in this Gospel. This contradiction has already been harped on, possibly to the point of weariness, but it is unavoidable in a defense of the position which cannot accept the absolutistic assertions. Clearly this position does not rest on arbitrariness. It is adopted in the interests of sober consistency, and not only logical consistency, but the deeper consistency of faith—faith in one God, one Omnipotent Spirit transcendent over all other spirits. The position *may* carry with it a tendency to minimize the significance of Christ and to become negative and unevangelical—as illustrated in Unitarianism—but it need not do so. Because this position may and does carry with it a reverence for and dependence on Christ essentially like that of the first Christians those holding it do not see the need of pitching overboard the doctrine of the Trinity. Indeed, they feel that that doctrine is a real safeguard against the tendency to depreciate the historic revelation of God in Christ, and the unique historic experience of God as indwelling Holy Spirit.

The speculative aspect of the Trinitarian doctrine never has been the vital element thereof. Neither has the valuation of Christ fully equating his personality with God, which gave rise to these speculations, this valuation resting on thought of God as localized in a particular dwelling-place, and on conceptions akin to those expressed in the messianic and Logos speculations. Even if for many Christians Christ apparently has had the value of God, that does not justify the equation of God and Christ. It simply means that such have not risen to what Professor Cairns, for one, believes to be the dominant type of apostolic religion. "Christians are those 'who through Jesus believe in God,' and this is not 'Godhead,' but 'the Father.'"

The freshness and fulness of God's revelation of himself in Christ, begetting faith in Christ as the Messiah, could easily lead the first followers of Christ to regard him as all-sufficient, and hence practically to equate God and Christ. Their resurrection

experiences would also, and probably chiefly, lead to such equation. But the most ardent apostle of Christ, the one most dependent on Christ, would always come back to faith in a God who is yet transcendent over Christ, to faith in Christ as the gracious mediator in the true religion. "To us there is one God, the Father, . . . and one Lord, Jesus Christ." "All is yours, ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." "There are varieties of talents, but the same Spirit; varieties of service, but the same Lord; varieties of effects, but the same God *who effects everything in everyone*." The self-sacrificing love of Christ, manifesting itself pre-eminently in the cross, was without doubt the real germinating principle of Paul's Christ-mysticism, and it was simply "a leap beyond the data" (to use Professor Cairns's phrase) to equate Christ and God, upon whom Christ himself felt dependent; as Paul himself would—according to the subordinationist passages—recognize in his soberer moments.

Neither the resurrection nor the sinlessness of Jesus, nor yet the implicates of the true atonement for sin, warrant that leap. Resurrection, sinlessness, atonement, can be given their full place in the Christian system without such equation, and here it must suffice to justify this contention on the basis of belief in but one God, at once transcendent and immanent—a belief, indeed, that has resulted from the paramount revelations of God in history, to which formal recognition is given in the doctrine of the Trinity. And so it is unfair to charge that the equation of God and Christ—to which also recognition is given in that doctrine—is rejected in the interests of an easier solution. For the modernist view is no *easier* than that in which the equation is accepted; it too has its insoluble problems. No, the rejection is solely in the interests of truth, in the interests of Christian monotheism, since no amount of interpretation can allay the conclusion that, to equate God and Christ, to say that Christ was invested with infinity, means in fact two infinite personalities, two gods; and the practical question—asked in sincerest reverence—what could the heavenly Christ exalted to infinity bestow, that God himself cannot bestow, through his self-disclosure in the person and work of the historic Jesus, and in direct communion with the individual soul?

But this is no treatise on the doctrine of the Trinity. Our primary concern was to show that the Christ-mysticism advocated by Troeltsch is *in essence* the same as that of Paul and John; that, at all events, it commends itself as quite adequate for the maintenance of the Christian faith and life.

In opposition to radical critics like Drews and W. B. Smith, Troeltsch places great stress on the historicity of Jesus. The contentions of these radicals, that it is immaterial whether or not our symbol has its roots in historical actuality; that, in fact, believers must free themselves from history, and satisfy their life-hunger with a mythical symbol—well, such contentions show, in Troeltsch's judgment, an utter inappreciation of religion and its practical tasks, however much they may appeal to the aesthete and dilettante. "For one who actually and inwardly belongs to the Christian life-world, it is impossible to hold the center and head of the community, the nucleating-point of all cultus and all perception of God, merely as a myth, be the myth never so attractive. Just as God is for him not mere Thought and Possibility, but Holy Reality, so he wishes also, in the case of his symbol of God, to stand on the firm ground of real life. It is for him of real significance, that an actual human being so lived, fought, believed, and conquered, and that from this real life a current of power and certainty flows that reaches even him. His symbol is a real symbol for him only because there stands behind it the majesty of a transcendent real religious prophet, wherein he not only finds God illustrated, but is able to overcome his own uncertainty and acquire spiritual strength; just as in other respects he needs the anchorage of superior personal-religious authority, and, as a matter of fact, in many instances he experiences."¹

Indeed, Troeltsch goes so far as to say: "Should it come to be decided that such a person as Jesus of Nazareth never lived, or that we cannot know what sort of person he really was, that would without doubt mean the beginning of the giving up of the Christ-symbol among scientifically trained people. And gradually the untrained laity would be overcome by doubt, and moved to abandon their Christ-faith."²

¹ *Die Bedeutung der Geschichtlichkeit Jesu*, pp. 31 f.

² *Ibid.*, p. 34.

"It is a mere *Redensart*," he continues, "to want to confine oneself to the Christian *Prinzip*, and let the historical problems take care of themselves. That might be a practical way out for individuals who cannot work their way through difficult obscurities; but it is impossible for a religious and cultish community. . . . Individuals there may be who, by powerful instinct, can look with indifference upon historical research and the question of historicity; . . . but, in general, men need the security of historical trustworthiness that scientific research is able to furnish."

The "fact of Christ," like all other historical facts which come down to us in the form of reports, must be reasonably established through historical research. "Faith can interpret facts, but it cannot establish them." That is, it cannot establish their historicity. Historic facts, like the person and work of Christ, may and do awaken and support faith, but, as before pointed out, it is to argue in a circle to maintain that faith can determine whether such and such person actually lived, or such and such event really occurred; historico-critical study alone can determine this. But the real point that Troeltsch would emphasize in this context is that the vitality of Christian faith rests in a real sense upon the historicity of Jesus. It is of vital importance to faith that the spiritual grace, the love, the righteous will disclosed in the narratives of the life of Christ, were actually disclosed in and by a person who actually lived. Indeed, the religious life of the primitive Christians and their successors would be inexplicable otherwise. Prophets and psalmists had preached and sung about the love and righteousness of God, and called the people to forsake sin and error, but what average mankind evidently needed was an actual demonstration of the things of God. That demonstration, Christians hold, is furnished by Jesus Christ; and they hold that their faith would never have become the living faith it has become for multitudes the world over had it not been inspired by him who, as God's chosen son, as the firstborn among many brethren, really demonstrated faith's content, with fulness, clarity, and power, in an actual and not a mythical life.

This is not saying that the truth of the Christian *Prinzip* rests upon the historicity of Jesus. As stated above, that hinges upon

its own inherent truthfulness. It simply means that the Christian *Prinzip* would never have become the living force it has been, nor would it continue as a living force, did not its roots lodge in the historic Jesus. It is a life-connection, and should it be proved, Troeltsch contends, that Jesus never lived, it would sooner or later mean the disintegration of Christianity and the virtual decease of its *Prinzip*. There would no longer be a trustworthy rallying-point, and without a dependable focus such as Christianity has had in Jesus, Christianity as a living religion could not be propagated.

In thus contending Troeltsch does not mean to say that every little detail of historico-theological research is of consequence for religious faith. "Only the fundamental facts are of consequence: the actual existence of Jesus; the determinative significance of the personality of Jesus for the origin and development of the Christ-faith; the religious-ethical basic character of the preaching of Jesus; and the transformations which his preaching underwent in the oldest Christian communities formed by their Christ-cultus." And it is Troeltsch's conviction that, "despite all the questions that are yet open, the decisive facts of importance are quite certainly verified." The extremely radical contention that Jesus never lived, he thinks, "is unquestionably a monstrosity."

In conclusion, a sentence or two from *Die Zukunftsmöglichkeiten des Christentums* may be quoted as a summary. "The Christology here expounded is by no means identical with the christological dogma of the church, but it does embody the inmost motive of that dogma. It is the Christ-mysticism of an inner union with the Head of the Christian community, from whom power and life flow to the members of the community, and in whose realization as the revelation and symbol of God the Christian cultus is consummated. Without this Christ-mysticism there would be no specifically Christian cultus, and a religion without cultus would be a dying religion."¹

¹ *Gesammelte Schriften*, II, 851.